

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 237 149

JC 830 536

AUTHOR Moore, Helen A.
TITLE Community Colleges and Higher Education. Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey, NASIS-82, #3.
INSTITUTION Nebraska Univ., Lincoln. Dept. of Sociology.
PUB DATE 82
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Attendance; College Role; *Community Colleges; *Educational Attitudes; State Surveys; *Student Educational Objectives; Transfer Programs; Two Year Colleges; Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

Data related to community college education in Nebraska are presented in this report as drawn from the sixth Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey, an ongoing study of the quality of life in the state. Introductory material details study methodology, funding sources, and uses of the data. Next, background information is provided on community colleges in Nebraska and recent changes in the proportions of arts and science graduates from these institutions. The ensuing sections present study findings related to the extent to which Nebraskans use the community colleges for vocational, transfer, and recreational purposes and the degree to which they support each of these functions. These findings indicate that: (1) 192 of the 1,906 Nebraska residents surveyed had attended a community college during the preceding year; (2) of those, 48.9% had taken one course, 25.5% two or three courses, and 25.6% four or more courses; (3) 35.4% of those taking courses intended to complete an associate degree or certificate; (4) 61.5% of those taking courses used the colleges to obtain a vocational education; and (5) approximately 80% of all respondents considered vocational programs "very important" to maintain, while 70% and 34% viewed the transfer function and liberal arts programs respectively as "very important" to maintain. (HB)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED237149

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official NIE
position or policy.

NASIS-82, #3

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

H. A. Moore

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND HIGHER
EDUCATION

Helen A. Moore

Department of Sociology

NEBRASKA ANNUAL SOCIAL INDICATORS SURVEY

Bureau of Sociological Research
Department of Sociology
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, Nebraska 68588-0325
Telephone: (402) 472-3672

Price: \$1.00

JC 830 536

The Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey

Helen A. Moore - 1982 Study Director

The findings in this report are based on data collected in the sixth Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey (NASIS). This survey is part of an on-going study of the quality of life in Nebraska conducted by the Bureau of Sociological Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The sample for NASIS consists of 1907 respondents eighteen years of age or older residing in households in Nebraska. The sample is selected through a process called random digit dialing: within each three-digit prefix in the state, four-digit numbers are selected randomly from all possible four-digit numbers to complete the telephone number. Respondents are further chosen randomly from the adults in the household and interviewed by telephone by experienced, professional interviewers from the offices of the Bureau of Sociological Research. All interviewing was done between February and April of 1982. This procedure produces a high-quality, representative sample of Nebraska adults. Analysis shows the sample to be representative of the state on age, sex, race, and geographical distribution.

The interview averaged approximately 47 minutes and included questions about energy use, health, recreation, political attitudes, occupation, education, family life, and other matters reflecting the quality of life experienced in the state. For the entire sample, the chances are 95 in 100 that the true value for the population lies within a range equal to the reported survey percentage plus or minus 2.24 percent. This is an estimate of maximum error and for most items the percentages are likely to be even more accurate.

The data gathered by NASIS are used by a wide variety of State and local government agencies for policy and program planning and by faculty and students at the University of Nebraska and other colleges for research. No information identifying any respondent is released to any user and the strict confidentiality of individual respondents is rigidly enforced. While the final responsibility for the organization and structure of the survey and for reports produced under its name rests with the Bureau of Sociological Research, public agencies and University departments play an integral part in planning the survey through an Advisory Committee. Public organizations interested in membership on the Advisory Committee should contact the NASIS Study Director.

Funding for NASIS comes from the University of Nebraska, the Bureau of Sociological Research and State and local agencies which buy items and data analysis from the survey.

The NASIS surveys are repeated each year to measure changes in the quality of life in Nebraska. While there is a core of questions which is included every year, each survey has a large component of unique items which address specific topical issues. Plans for future years include reinterviewing the 1977 panel every two years to assess changes in their lives. Additional detail on the NASIS surveys regarding use of the survey data or cost of purchasing items on future surveys can be obtained by contacting the NASIS Study Director at the Bureau of Sociological Research or by sending for a copy of the 1983 NASIS Prospectus.

Community Colleges and Higher Education

The community college system sprang from the mid-West image of an expanding educational frontier. In 1901, Joilet Junior College opened in Illinois with the intent of extending secondary education and providing innovative educational programs to a rapidly growing population. Throughout the last two decades enrollment in these programs has grown enormously. They have also taken myriad shapes and functions as local residents, educators, and administrators have sought to develop programs designed to meet post-secondary educational needs at the community level.

Unlike four-year colleges, the purposes of community and junior colleges has been more diverse. In many states, a separate two-year vocational degree program is the primary function of community colleges. Often these programs are not intended as liberal arts or transfer programs. In other states, however, the community colleges provide an opportunity for "late blooming" students to improve their academic preparation and prove their ability to succeed in higher education. This "transfer" function of the community college sets up "feeder" programs into four-year state colleges and universities.

In the State of Nebraska, six community colleges serve residents with vocational, liberal arts and recreational courses. Historically, the emphasis has remained on occupational and technical training, as indicated by the title "Technical Community Colleges." However, since 1975, a shift has occurred in the percentage of degrees and awards presented by these community colleges. In 1974-1975, over 83 percent of all awards were science, engineering or business and commerce areas. In 1979-1980, that figure dropped to 78 percent of awards. Thus, liberal arts and public service degrees and awards have increased from 16 percent to 21 percent of the total, an increase of over one-fourth. This suggests that the utilization of community colleges in Nebraska may be shifting.

With rising educational costs and increased demand for college education by employers, many students have turned to community colleges for transfer and/or recreational purposes, even though that is not the primary mission of the institution. To what extent do Nebraskans use community colleges for vocational, transfer, and recreation purposes? How much support do Nebraskans extend to each of these functions? This report focuses on these questions as they were asked of a 1982 representative sample of the state population through the Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey.

Utilization of Community Colleges

Of the 1906 respondents in the survey, a total of 192 (10.1 percent) indicated that they had attended a course at a community college in Nebraska during the preceding year. According to Nebraska State Education Commission statistics, approximately 23,000 Nebraskans attended Community Colleges in 1981-1982.¹ We measured the extent to which our respondents use the community colleges, and whether they are working toward a degree. The two questions we asked of those taking courses were:

1. During the past year, how many courses have you taken at a community college or junior college in the State of Nebraska?

One	48.9%
Two or Three	25.5%
Four or More	25.6%

2. Do you intend to complete an associate degree or program certificate at a community college?

Yes	35.4%
No	64.6%

These answers suggest that Nebraskans use the community colleges for different reasons. Close to two-thirds of those attending do not currently

¹Fall Head Count Enrollments in Nebraska Institutions of Post-Secondary Education: 1977 through 1981. Nebraska Coordinating Council for Post-Secondary Education. July, 1982.

intend to complete a degree or program certificate. In addition, many students attend on a part-time basis, with close to three-fourths of the students taking three or fewer courses per year.

We next examined the types of courses in which these respondents actually enrolled. The results in Table 1 indicate that the majority of students (61.5 percent) used community colleges to obtain a vocational education. This reflects an interest in improving job skills directly related to employment. A smaller proportion (20.8 percent) attended hobby or recreation classes, and the smallest attendance was in liberal arts courses (12.0 percent). A total of 5.7 percent of respondents took a combination of courses.

We also found some important differences in the characteristics of students that were enrolled in these classes. For example, men and women use the community colleges at different rates (82 males and 110 females) and for different purposes. A majority of both men and women took primarily vocational courses at the community colleges, but this trend was substantially stronger among males. Women were more likely than men to be enrolled in hobby and recreation classes and more than twice as likely to take liberal arts courses.

Age is also a factor in course enrollments. Each of the three age groups examined were most likely to be enrolled in vocational programs. However, the vocational courses were selected at a greater rate by younger students (18 to 29 years of age). Respondents in the 30 to 49 year old age group were much more likely to be enrolled in liberal arts courses than these younger students, and the age 50 and over respondents were most likely of all age groups to be enrolled in the liberal arts courses. The hobby and recreation courses were used proportionately more often by the 30 to 49 year old age

group, and least likely to be used by the 50 and over age group. Both the age and sex characteristics of these respondents suggest that "non traditional" students (women and older students) are most likely to enroll in the liberal arts courses, and somewhat less likely to take advantage of the traditional vocational programs of the community colleges.

Finally, we examined the use of the community colleges by rural and urban residence. Of those respondents who did enroll in classes, rural residents were the least likely to enroll in liberal arts courses, somewhat less likely than other Nebraskans to use the hobby and recreation courses, but were more likely to take a combination of classes or to focus on vocational programs exclusively. Urban residents (excluding Omaha) were more frequently enrolled in hobby and recreation courses and the least involved in vocational classes.

The Community College Mission

While utilization of the community college system is one indicator of support for varying programs, we also asked all respondents in the survey their opinion about the importance of community college education. All 1907 respondents were asked the following:

The roles of community colleges have been expanding over the past few years, while tax dollars decrease. I would like to ask you what you think about the importance of keeping each of the following programs at community colleges in Nebraska. Do you think these are very important programs, somewhat important programs, or not important programs at all to keep operating?

Respondents were then asked their opinions about these programs separately:

(1) Programs providing vocational and technical skills to students, (2) Hobby classes and recreation programs, (3) Liberal arts education programs, and (4) First and second year college programs that can be transferred to a four-year college or university.

The analysis in Table 2 indicates the percent of respondents who felt it was "very important" to maintain a particular program. Overall, the strongest support for programs was given to those which provide vocational and technical training, with approximately 80 percent of respondents indicating a "very important" rating. The transfer function of community college programs also received strong support from 70 percent of respondents as "very important". The liberal arts programs were rated as very important by over one-third of respondents and hobby/recreational courses were rated very important by less than one fifth of respondents. It should be noted that when ratings of "somewhat important" and "very important" were combined, Nebraska respondents indicated substantial support for the maintenance of each of these programs at a rate of 77 percent approval or greater.

More detailed examination of Table 2 suggests that trends in sex, age, and rural-urban differences in use of community colleges are reinforced by differing attitudes toward the specific programs. Notably, women respondents were significantly more supportive of liberal arts, hobby/recreation, and two-year transfer programs than men. Women were also more likely to utilize these programs. Among the age groups, few significant differences were evident. However, those respondents in the 70 year-and-older category were significantly less likely to support vocational and transfer programs. This may be due to the general under-utilization of these programs by these respondents. Interestingly, hobby/recreation programs receive the greatest support for this age group, and significantly lower support from the 30 to 49 year-old age group. These findings quite likely reflect the fact that older students are less concerned with educational programs related to careers. They have more time and interest in hobby and recreation programs after retirement from full-time occupations.

Finally, some minor differences are evident among respondents from different resident categories. Nebraskans in rural, non-farm residences were least likely of all groups to support liberal arts programs, and significantly more likely to support hobby-recreation programs indicating that community colleges serve different purposes in rural areas. That is, the community colleges quite likely are a major resource for recreation/hobby activities in rural areas where fewer of these types of activities are found. In urban areas, resources other than community colleges provide community members with recreation/hobby activities.

Summary

From these responses, we can identify several major trends in respondent use and attitudes toward community colleges in the state.

- 1) Vocational-technical programs remain the highest demand function of the technical community colleges, particularly among younger students and males.
- 2) Among non-traditional students (older students and females) the utilization of liberal arts programs is much higher.
- 3) General support of all four components of community college functions (vocational, liberal arts, recreational and transfer) is high among Nebraskans. More than 70 percent agree that each area is somewhat important to maintain, even in the face of budget cuts.
- 4) Specific support of programs as "very important" highlights the vocational and two-year transfer programs of the community colleges as the most widely supported. The two-year transfer program receives its greatest support from younger respondents and from female respondents. Vocational programs receive across-the-board support from all groups in the state.

The technical community colleges show the greatest growth rate in enrollments of all post-secondary educational institutions in the state. Thus, an understanding of the current and future demands of both traditional and non-traditional students must be understood by policy makers and the residents of the state who support these programs through tax dollars.

These data suggest that the diverse needs of students, both young and old, male and female, traditional and non-traditional, require a flexible program that incorporates several different educational functions beyond the original technical-occupational emphasis.

Table 2.
Percent of Nebraska Respondents Rating Community College
Programs as "Very Important" to Maintain

	<u>Vocational</u>	<u>Liberal Arts</u>	<u>Hobby</u>	<u>Two-Year Transfer</u>	<u>N</u>
Overall	80.4	34.2	19.2	70.0	
Sex:					
Male	.80	.29	.15	.65	874
Female	.82	.38*	.21*	.75*	958
Age:					
18 - 29	.80	.31	.21	.69	550
30 - 49	.81	.35	.14*	.74	632
50 - 69	.81	.33	.18	.70	488
70 +	.72*	.25	.22	.59*	161
Residence:					
Rural	.80	.31	.13	.69	285
Rural Non-Farm	.73	.25*	.31*	.67	116
Town or City	.79	.33	.17	.72	836
Lincoln	.87	.31	.20	.63	167
Omaha	.77	.35	.19	.71	429

*Denotes this group is significantly different (at $P < .05$) from others in the category, after controlling for the effect of respondents' sex, age, or residence.

List of reports already released using data gathered in the 1982 Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey. These may be purchased at the indicated price from the Bureau of Sociological Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Report Number

Title

1. Designs, Procedures, Instruments and Forms for the 1982 NASIS. Helen A. Moore. Price: \$7.50.
2. Attitudes Toward Social Security. Warren Luckner. Price: \$1.25.

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges
8118 Math-Sciences Building
University of California
Los Angeles, California 90024

DEC 23 1983